

1 **3.15 RECREATION**

2 This section addresses the potential for the use of recreational facilities to increase as a result of
3 implementing the proposed Conservation Plan, leading to their deterioration, as well as the
4 potential for decreased recreational opportunities.

5 **3.15.1 Affected Environment**

6 **3.15.1.1 Lower Colorado River**

7 Key recreational resources are identified by river reach, although much of the river system,
8 including undeveloped land, is used for a variety of recreational purposes, including camping,
9 fishing, boating, canoeing, hunting, and water-skiing.

10 *Reach 1*

11 GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK

12 Grand Canyon National Park is located in northern Arizona. Created as a national park in 1919,
13 it was designated as a World Heritage Site in 1979. The park encompasses 277 miles of the
14 Colorado River and adjacent uplands and contains 1.28 million acres. The park had more than
15 4.4 million recreation visits in 2001 (NPS 2002).

16 HUALAPAI INDIAN RESERVATION

17 The Hualapai Reservation offers camping, fishing, hiking, and big game hunting. A tribal
18 enterprise operates a river rafting company that offers rafting trips on the Colorado River.

19 LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

20 Lake Mead NRA extends along the LCR from the western border of Grand Canyon National
21 Park to Davis Dam. The Lake Mead portion is 110 miles long, with a surface area of 274 square
22 miles and more than 500 miles of shore. The lakes within the NRA provide boating, canoeing,
23 kayaking, sport fishing, swimming, and water skiing opportunities; while its desert offers
24 impressive scenery enjoyed by hikers and wildlife photographers. Three of America's four
25 desert ecosystems; i.e., the Great Basin, the Mojave, and the Sonoran deserts, converge in the
26 Lake Mead NRA. As a result, this seemingly barren area contains a large variety of plant and
27 animal species. A number of campgrounds and picnic areas provide additional recreational
28 opportunities and include Boulder Beach, Calville Bay, Echo Beach, Las Vegas Bay, and Temple
29 Bar. The Lake Mead NRA has approximately 6 million visitor use days per year (NPS 2001).

30 *Reach 2*

31 LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

32 The Lake Mead NRA extends into Reach 2. Lake Mohave, which is formed by Davis Dam, is
33 part of this NRA. Lake Mohave is a 67-mile stretch of the Colorado River north of Bullhead
34 City, Arizona and Laughlin, Nevada. The lake is comparatively narrow, not more than 4 miles
35 across at its widest point. It is confined for most of its length between the steep walls of Black,

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1 El Dorado, Painted, and Pyramid canyons. Lake Mohave provides habitat for fish and wildlife,
2 and the area around Lake Mohave (e.g., Cottonwood Cove and Katherine Landing) and along
3 the Colorado River below Davis Dam provides a multitude of recreational opportunities.
4 Activities include boating, camping, exploring, fishing, photography, picnicking, swimming,
5 and water skiing. There are also hundreds of beaches that can only be accessed by boat. Noted
6 fish species in the area include largemouth and rainbow trout and striped bass.

7 *Reach 3*

8 LAUGHLIN

9 Laughlin, Nevada is set in a rugged mountain terrain that slopes to the banks of the Colorado
10 River. Laughlin offers an abundance of recreational water activities, as well as gambling and
11 nightclub entertainment. Approximately 5 million visitors visit the Laughlin area each year
12 (Laughlin, Nevada Chamber of Commerce 2003).

13 BULLHEAD CITY

14 Bullhead City, which is located in Mohave County, features the Colorado River, miles of natural
15 hiking, thousands of acres of public lands, the Lake Mead NRA, Arizona's Veteran Memorial,
16 and the Colorado River Museum. More than 5 million people travel through Bullhead City
17 annually (Desert USA 2003). Activities in the Bullhead City area include ghost town
18 exploration, hiking, hunting, OHV use, rockhounding, and water sports on the Colorado River
19 and Lake Mohave.

20 DAVIS CAMP

21 Located near Bullhead City, Davis Camp, a campground and day use area, has boat launching
22 facilities, picnic areas, numerous campsites, and RV hookups. Davis Camp offers many
23 recreational opportunities, including fishing and water sports.

24 NEEDLES

25 Needles offers a wide range of recreational opportunities, including camping, fishing, hiking,
26 sightseeing, swimming, and other water sports.

27 HAVASU NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

28 The Havasu NWR covers 30 river miles (300 miles of shoreline) from Lake Havasu City,
29 Arizona to Needles, California and includes one of the last remaining natural stretches of the
30 LCR, which flows through the 20-mile-long Topock Gorge (USFWS 2002f). Four endangered
31 bird species reside here: the peregrine falcon, the southern bald eagle, the southwestern willow
32 flycatcher, and the Yuma clapper rail (USFWS 2002f). Typical activities include canoeing,
33 fishing, boating through the scenic Topock Gorge, and hiking in the Havasu Wilderness Area.
34 Each year, thousands of visitors explore the 4,000-acre Topock Marsh, which offers excellent
35 canoeing, fishing, and waterbird watching. Other activities offered by the Havasu NWR
36 include camping and hunting.

1 LAKE HAVASU STATE PARK

2 Lake Havasu, formed by Parker Dam, contains a number of coves and inlets, and is a popular
3 spot for fishing. The waters of the lake also are used for canoeing, houseboating, jet-skiing,
4 kayaking, sailing, speed-boating, swimming, and water-skiing. Camping and hiking also occur
5 along the more than 400 miles of the lake's shoreline. Additional tourist opportunities include
6 viewing the London Bridge.

7 BILL WILLIAMS RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

8 The Bill Williams River NWR is located along the Bill Williams River near its confluence with
9 the LCR. The refuge offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including hiking and bird
10 watching (as well as other wildlife viewing), with opportunities to view Yuma clapper rails and
11 southwestern willow flycatchers, among other species. Hunting is permitted for dove,
12 cottontail, quail, and desert bighorn sheep. Other activities include boating and fishing.

13 *Reach 4*

14 PARKER STRIP RECREATION AREA

15 The Parker Strip Recreation Area includes backcountry byways that traverse scenic corridors
16 providing historic, natural, prehistoric, and scenic values along an 11-mile road that travels
17 along the Colorado River. Recreational activities include boating, camping, fishing, hiking, rock
18 hounding, swimming, and wildlife viewing.

19 PALO VERDE DIVERSION DAM

20 There are approximately 95 miles of navigable water between the Imperial Dam below Yuma
21 and the Palo Verde Diversion Dam above Blythe. Activities include canoeing, fishing, hunting,
22 power boating, and other water sports.

23 BLYTHE

24 Exploring ghost towns, hiking, hunting, and OHV sports are a few of the recreational activities
25 available in the desert around Blythe. In addition, many water sports may be enjoyed along the
26 Colorado River.

27 CIBOLA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

28 The Cibola NWR, which includes Cibola Lake, is located about 15 miles south of Blythe. The
29 largest concentration of Canada geese and sandhill cranes on the LCR winter at the refuge.
30 Visitors to the refuge engage in canoeing, fishing, hiking through native cottonwood, mesquite
31 and willow plant communities, hunting, photography, and wildlife observation. Over 288
32 species of birds have been found in the Cibola NWR, including Gambel's quail, greater sandhill
33 cranes, many species of migratory songbirds, mourning and white-winged doves, roadrunners,
34 snow geese and Vermilion flycatchers (USFWS 2002a). The bald eagle, southwestern willow
35 flycatcher, and Yuma clapper rail are among the endangered birds that use Cibola NWR. Other
36 listed species include the bonytail, desert pupfish, desert tortoise, and razorback sucker.

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1 *Reach 5*

2 PICACHO STATE RECREATION AREA

3 Picacho SRA is a popular area for camping, desert exploring, river running, and sportfishing.
4 Picacho SRA is bordered by 8 miles of the Colorado River and is approximately 24 miles north
5 of the U.S.-Mexico boundary. The area has a group boat-in area, three individual boat-in camp
6 areas, and large group camping areas. Bird watching and small game hunting for doves, ducks,
7 and quail are among other recreational opportunities.

8 IMPERIAL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

9 Imperial NWR protects habitat for wildlife species along 30 miles of the LCR in Arizona and
10 California, including the last unchannelized section before the river enters Mexico (USFWS
11 2002g). The river, and its associated backwater lakes and wetlands, are a green oasis,
12 contrasting with the surrounding desert mountains. Recreational opportunities include
13 canoeing, fishing, and hunting. The refuge surrounds one of the few remaining "wild" places
14 on the Colorado River and is valued by boaters for its remote scenery. In addition, scenic drives
15 through the Sonoran Desert landscape allow access to the lookout points and the Painted Desert
16 Trail.

17 MARTINEZ LAKE

18 Martinez Lake, which adjoins the Imperial NWR, encompasses 300 to 500 acres and is an
19 attraction catering to anglers, birdwatchers, boaters, fishers, hunters, nature lovers, rock
20 hounds, sightseers, and water skiers. Martinez Lake has a large variety of birds year around
21 that can be viewed from boats on the Colorado River as well as the many side lakes along the
22 river.

23 *Reach 6*

24 BETTY'S KITCHEN

25 Betty's Kitchen, a 10-acre wildlife interpretive area, provides birdwatching and fishing
26 opportunities.

27 MITTRY LAKE WILDLIFE AREA

28 Mittry Lake, within the Mittry Lake Wildlife Area, covers approximately 600 acres and has
29 undergone rehabilitation work, including fish habitat improvement, marsh dredging, and
30 revegetation, making it an ideal location for small game hunting and sportfishing. Major
31 species for small game hunting include doves, quail, rabbit, raccoon, and waterfowl. Major
32 species of fish in the lake include bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, flathead catfish, and
33 largemouth bass. There is a 3-lane boat launch ramp for motorized boating on the lake. The
34 area is also popular for birdwatching and nature study.

1 *Reach 7*

2 YUMA

3 The City of Yuma is located on the edge of the historic floodplain to the east of the Colorado
4 River. The area offers a number of recreational opportunities, including boating, fishing,
5 hunting, and swimming.

6 **3.15.1.2 *Muddy River/Moapa Valley and Virgin River***

7 Recreational activities such as camping, boating, fishing, and hiking occur on upper Lake Mead,
8 described above. The Overton Wildlife Management Area provides opportunities for wildlife
9 viewing and photography, waterfowl and upland game bird hunting, hiking, and fishing. The
10 Overton Wildlife Management Area has an average of 5,300 annual visitor use days (NDOW
11 2001).

12 **3.15.1.3 *Bill Williams River***

13 The Bill Williams River NWR is located along the Bill Williams River, as described above.
14 Alamo Lake State Park, located at the eastern end of this off-site conservation area, includes
15 fishing, hiking, wildlife watching, and camping.

16 **3.15.1.4 *Lower Gila River***

17 The lower Gila River offers limited recreational opportunities, mostly in the form of wildlife
18 observation and some warm-water fishing in the area with permanent water below Dome.
19 Additionally, small game waterfowl hunting is available in the Lower Gila River area.

20 **3.15.2 *Environmental Consequences***

21 ***Significance Criteria***

22 The project would result in a significant impact if it would result in any of the following:

- 23 • increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational
24 facilities such that substantial deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated;
25 or
- 26 • cause the direct loss or substantial physical degradation of either public recreation uses
27 or public recreational facilities resulting in decreased recreational opportunities, such as
28 sport fishing, bird watching, or waterfowl hunting.

29 **3.15.2.1 *Alternative 1: Proposed Conservation Plan***

30 ***Impacts***

31 Established conservation areas would be located on agricultural or undeveloped land owned by
32 public agencies, Indian tribes, or private owners. Access to habitat conservation sites would be
33 controlled in order to protect the covered species and their habitats. Developed and heavily
34 used recreational areas would not be suitable for conservation area establishment and thus

1 would not be directly affected by the proposed action. The conversion of agricultural land to
2 conservation areas would not adversely affect recreational resources, because this land is
3 generally not used for recreational purposes and is not accessible to the public. Water-based
4 recreation generally would not be affected by the proposed action. As described in section 3.9,
5 Hydrology, the relatively minor amount of water required to irrigate vegetation in conservation
6 areas would not lower the water surface elevation of the LCR, and thus would not affect the
7 operation of marinas, other boating facilities, or navigation in the river. Additionally, the
8 proposed action would not restrict use of boating areas.

9 **Impact REC-1. The implementation of certain conservation measures could result in the loss**
10 **of recreational opportunities.** The conversion of undeveloped land to conservation areas could
11 result in the loss of some recreational opportunities, such as camping, fishing, and access to the
12 LCR. This impact would be *less than significant* because a relatively small area would be affected
13 in relationship to the total area available (the planning area contains approximately 126,000
14 acres of woody riparian vegetation and a maximum of 8,132 acres of conservation areas would
15 be established), and the displacement of a limited amount of recreational uses to other areas
16 would not result in the degradation of these areas. Limited fishing opportunities may be lost if
17 backwaters were established in areas already used by the public for this purpose. Again, only a
18 small area would be affected (360 acres out of 7,911 acres of open water [GEO/Graphics 2000]);
19 thus, this impact would be *less than significant*.

20 The implementation of certain species-specific conservation measures also could result in the
21 loss of access to recreational uses. Specifically, measures for the desert tortoise and flat-tailed
22 horned lizard (DETO1 and FTHL1) include acquiring and protecting 230 acres of existing
23 unprotected habitat, and measures for the lowland leopard frog include protecting existing
24 unprotected habitat (LLFR2). To the extent that the protected habitat for these species was on
25 lands used for public recreational purposes, access would be lost. Since the amount of
26 recreational area that could be removed from public use is small in comparison to the area
27 available (approximately 423,500 acres within the planning area are in open space or used for
28 recreational purposes), the impact would be *less than significant*.

29 Population enhancement measures that could be implemented include controlling piscivorous
30 fish in established backwaters prior to their use as grow-out facilities. This impact would be
31 localized, would have a minor impact on overall fish populations, and would occur in
32 conservation areas that would not be accessible to the public. The impact to fishing would be
33 *less than significant*.

34 *Mitigation Measures*

35 No mitigation measures are required because no significant impacts would occur.

36 *Residual Impacts*

37 Residual impacts are those that would occur after the implementation of mitigation measures to
38 reduce an impact. No mitigation measures are required; thus, no residual impacts would occur.

1 3.15.2.2 *Alternative 2: No Action Alternative*

2 *Impacts*

3 Under the no action alternative, it is likely that conservation measures similar to those included
4 in the proposed action would be implemented since compliance with the ESA still would be
5 required for the covered actions, although some conservation could occur in the off-site
6 conservation areas (as described in section 3.15.2.4 below), as well as along the LCR. **Impact**
7 **REC-1** applies to this alternative. The same type of *less than significant* impacts would occur as
8 described for the proposed action, but the overall magnitude would be lessened since a smaller
9 amount of conservation area would be established.

10 *Mitigation Measures*

11 No mitigation measures are required because no significant impacts would occur.

12 *Residual Impacts*

13 Residual impacts are those that would occur after the implementation of mitigation measures to
14 reduce an impact. No mitigation measures are required; thus, no residual impacts would occur.

15 3.15.2.3 *Alternative 3: Listed Species Only*

16 *Impacts*

17 **Impact REC-1** applies to this alternative. A smaller amount of conservation area would be
18 developed than under the proposed action. Therefore, the same types of *less than significant*
19 impacts would occur as described for the proposed action, but the overall magnitude would be
20 lessened since a smaller area would be affected.

21 *Mitigation Measures*

22 No mitigation measures are required because no significant impacts would occur.

23 *Residual Impacts*

24 Residual impacts are those that would occur after the implementation of mitigation measures to
25 reduce an impact. No mitigation measures are required; thus, no residual impacts would occur.

26 3.15.2.4 *Alternative 4: Off-Site Conservation*

27 *Impacts*

28 **Impact REC-1** applies to this alternative. The difference between this alternative and the
29 proposed action is that most conservation measures would be implemented at different
30 locations (along the Muddy/Virgin, Bill Williams, and lower Gila rivers). The conservation
31 measures directly related to fish, including backwater creation, would be implemented in the
32 planning area, as described for the proposed action.

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1 *Mitigation Measures*

2 No mitigation measures are required because no significant impacts would occur.

3 *Residual Impacts*

4 Residual impacts are those that would occur after the implementation of mitigation measures to
5 reduce an impact. No mitigation measures are required; thus, no residual impacts would occur.